



Guide to Working with the Media

This guide has been developed to help you work with the local media to maximize the impact of your *Give Kids Good Schools Week* event.

STEP 1: Develop a Press List

Develop a list of reporters to cultivate, reach out to and invite to GKGS Week events. Include newspaper, television and radio reporters who cover education, as well as reporters who cover state and local politics; include columnists from local papers as well as newsletters for education-based organizations, think tanks, and local business. Contact the public relations departments of stakeholder organizations involved in planning the event. Ask for their help in refining your press list and pitching the event, as well as including articles in their newsletters.

Tips for Developing Media Lists and Newsroom Contacts:

1. Some key people you will want to include are: news staffers who are responsible for assigning stories to reporters, key reporters or producers who cover education issues and Hispanic and African-American community reporters, and editors of the op-ed and editorial pages of local newspapers.
2. If you do not have access to an existing list, create one. Begin by looking in your local phone book for listings of TV and radio stations and local daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. You can also use the U.S. Newspaper List Web site at www.usnpl.com, "Bacon's Media Yellow Book" and the "News Media Yellow Book," which can be found at your local library. Call each outlet to determine the appropriate media contact. People to include on your list are:
 - Print: 1) city editor/writer; 2) writers for the calendar or community events page; 3) columnists who have an interest in education; and 4) photo editors (for particularly visual events)
 - TV: 1) planning editors; 2) assignment editors; 3) reporters/on-air personalities; and 4) producers of specific shows like morning shows or community programs
 - Radio: 1) news directors; 2) assignment desk staff; 3) public affairs show hosts and/or producers; and 4) on-air personalities
3. Remember to include smaller media outlets on your list, including local cable access TV, community newspapers and local parenting magazines and tabloids. If there are local internet news sites and/or web logs (blogs) that cover education, also include these.
4. If you have a bureau of the Associated Press (AP) wire service in your community, add the bureau chief or assignment editor to the list.

STEP 2: Develop Materials to Distribute to the Media

A press kit with materials about your press event as part of *Give Kids Good Schools Week* will help reporters understand the issue and the purpose of the event. It will also give you an opportunity to make the case for why this is an important story to cover.

The press kit for your event should include the following:

- Bios of spokespersons
- A press release – Ask your event participants for a quote to use in your press release. Make sure to include a contact and phone number on the release so reporters can call if they have questions after the event. Distribute the press release to all reporters on your press list the morning of the event. A template press release for *Give Kids Good Schools Week* is available at www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org.
- Fact sheets – Fact sheets about public schools are available on the *Give Kids Good Schools* Web site at www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org. Add specific data about your state or community to the fact sheets if possible, and include background on your organization or Local Education Fund.
- *GKGS* Folder – Put all the press kit materials in folders with pockets, stick a *GKGS* sticker on the front – and you have a professional *GKGS* press kit.

Step 3: Get the Event on Reporters' and the Community's Calendars

Promote the event in advance by sending information to television, radio and newspaper community calendars. A community calendar listing is a place where people can find out about upcoming events in their area. These listings are often printed in local newspapers or newsletters, posted on community Web sites, or broadcast on local radio and television stations. A listing gives a short description of the event; the location, date and time of the event; and contact information so people can obtain more details. The purpose of these listings is not to get media to the event, but to encourage the community to attend your event. A template community calendar listing will be available on the website as *GKGS* week approaches.

Send a media advisory to your press list. Three business days before the event, fax and/or e-mail reporters a media advisory that details who will be participating in the event, where and when it is being held, and contact information so reporters can contact you with any questions. A template media advisory will be available on the website as *GKGS* week approaches.

Get your event on the AP daybook. News services such as the Associated Press (AP) maintain a daybook and distribute it through their wire services to journalists throughout a state or community. Newsroom managers, assignment editors and reporters from other media outlets check the daybook for the latest updates on important events. Here is a step-by-step guide for pitching and placing stories on the AP daybook:

You must pitch your event to the daybook editor in order to have it placed on the calendar of news events for a specific day, just as you would pitch an assignment editor to cover your event.

1. Consider pitching events that include one or all of the following elements:
 - Media-friendly activities or appealing visuals

- Participation by a well-known public figure, students, teachers, or parents
2. Prepare a news advisory with the who, what, when and where of your *Give Kids Good Schools Week* event.
 3. Visit the [AP Web site](#) to find the bureau in your area.
 4. Contact the daybook editor, pitch your event and e-mail a copy of your news advisory to the bureau.
 5. Follow up with the daybook editor to find out when your event will be listed. Note: When contacting local reporters, refer to the daybook listing in your pitch (e.g. "You may have seen our event in the AP daybook. I'm calling to give you additional information about our event").
 6. Update the daybook editor if there are changes in your event location or time, or if prominent speakers join your efforts.

Step 4: Place an Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed) or Letter to the Editor

Improving public education opportunities for every child in America is great fodder for an op-ed or letter to the editor. What follows are some specific suggestions for getting an op-ed or letter to the editor placed.

Opinion-Editorials

The op-ed section of a newspaper allows readers to share their opinions about timely issues.

Different groups have different perspectives on how to improve public education, and those perspectives can be represented in the op-eds they draft. A parent might be interested in drafting an op-ed on the importance of attending school board meetings and holding elected officials accountable, or a community member could write about the need for a forum to discuss how school issues impact the broader community. For ideas on op-eds, visit www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org and read the latest news on the issue of public education. You will also find a template op-ed that you can customize with local facts, figures, and anecdotes.

The following pointers will help you get your op-ed piece published:

- **Use *Give Kids Good Schools Week* as a news hook.** Tying your piece to the events you are planning for *Give Kids Good Schools Week* (October 10-16) will increase your chance of getting published.
- **Keep it brief.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. In general, 750 to 800 words will do.
- **Make a single point.** You only have 750 to 800 words. Make one point clearly and persuasively.
- **Avoid jargon.** Simple language ensures that all readers, even non-experts, can understand your point. For example, don't use acronyms or technical language.
- **Use examples.** Illustrations, anecdotes and personal stories are persuasive tools. They help explain and bring complicated issues to life.
- **Make a specific recommendation.** This is an opinion piece. State your opinion on how to improve matters.
- **Draw the reader in.** Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument.
- **End with a bang.** Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.
- **Follow up.** Most op-ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you haven't heard in that time frame or if your piece is particularly time sensitive, you can make one follow-up phone call to be sure it was received and ask about its status.

Guide to Editorial Placement

Make sure your article is double-spaced with wide margins. List your name, address, phone, fax and e-mail contact information at the top of the piece. Find out from your local paper the best way to send an op-ed. Instructions for submitting an op-ed are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear, or on the paper's Web site. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.

Letter to the Editor

The letters to the editor section of a newspaper is one of the most widely read sections and offers you a good way to express your thoughts about the importance of improving public education opportunities for every child in America. Your letter should be in response to an editorial, op-ed or article that has already run in the newspaper.

These tips will help:

- **Link to *Give Kids Good Schools Week* activities.** Editors are interested in printing letters that relate to events happening in the community.
- **Make one clear argument.** The piece should be in favor of, or critical of, a particular position taken by the paper or described in an article.
- **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in an article or opinion piece.
- **Cite the article.** Be sure to mention the title and date of the article you're responding to in one of your first two sentences. For example "Dear Editor, Your recent coverage of the issue of education ("Public School Successes," May 13, 2007) was a thoughtful piece..."
- **Be brief.** Generally, four to six paragraphs are ideal. If you can't contain the piece to that length, consider asking someone to help you edit it down or write a 750-word op-ed instead.
- **Follow up.** If you have sent your letter to the editor and haven't heard anything within a week, make a follow-up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not respond to you immediately.
- **Include contact information.** You must include your name, address and daytime phone number in your letter. Instructions for submitting a letter to the editor are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear, or on the paper's Web site. Find out from your local paper the best way to send a letter. Some papers like them mailed, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mails.

Step 5: Pitch the Event to Reporters

Don't expect reporters to read everything you send them. Give them a call a day before the event to make sure they've seen your materials. See below for information about how to develop your news hook and the best times to call reporters.

Develop your news hook. What is the news of the press event? Examples include high-profile participants discussing the importance of a quality public education in your state or local community; students and teachers sharing their experience in the local school system; parents demonstrating how their involvement in local public schools have made a positive impact.

Provide the reporter with tools. What are you providing to help reporters tell your story? Will there be fact sheets or interviews? What will the visuals be at your event?

Will there be teachers, students, public officials and/or community leaders available for interviews?

Supplement the news hook with important information that can help reporters tell the story.

- Develop a set of pitch points. These are the main ideas that you will focus on to sell your story. You should customize these talking points to the event or activity you are hosting in your community.
- Underscore the significance of the issue for the local community by using state data/research.
- Check out www.GiveKidsGoodSchools.org for information about schools in your community
- Have spokespersons lined up who would be willing to discuss the issue. Offer reporters the opportunity to talk to students, teachers, parents, or other school officials.
- Call reporters during the week prior to the event and encourage them to come to the event and cover the story.
- Consider setting up advance interviews for some of your spokespersons to set the stage for the news conference.

IMPORTANT: Do not give the new research away when pitching reporters. Instead, preview the type of information that will be released at your news conference. For example, you could say: “At our news conference, we will release new data about how Americans feel about public education.”

Respect reporters’ deadlines.

- **Print:** It is best to call a newsroom between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., when reporters are likely to be available and not on deadline.
- **Television:** Planning editors generally take calls between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., but not around the noon hour, when they are putting together their mid-day news show. It is best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m.
- **Radio:** The best time to call is early, between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. After that, the staff goes into planning meetings. You can start calling again after 10:00 a.m. News directors, reporters and producers are often gone by the afternoon. If a reporter is not able to attend the event, offer to have one of your spokespersons do a taped interview.

Follow up with the reporters who come to your event and those who couldn’t make it. Call those who did not come and offer to email, fax, and/or mail them a press kit and the news release. For those who did attend, call to see if they need to interview anyone or if they need more information for their story.

Do’s and Don’ts of Media Pitching

- DO be concise while pitching the story
- DO assume your event is worth a reporter attending
- DO be enthusiastic about your event
- DO be persistent and call back if you do not get in touch with the reporter right away
- DON’T leave a long phone message with your phone number at the end; leave your name and number immediately after your brief pitch
- DON’T call to see if an e-mail was received
- DON’T pitch two reporters at the same news outlet at the same time

- DON'T read a script
- DON'T argue with a reporter
- DON'T call during a big news story or at deadline

Timeline for Media Outreach

Three to four weeks prior to activities:

- Send community calendar listing

Three to four business days before the event:

- E-mail the news advisory to everyone on your list. Make follow-up calls to pitch the event and gauge media interest.

The day before the event:

- Send the advisory again and follow up with contacts that you haven't spoken with yet.

The morning of the event:

- Call again just to find out who's attending. E-mail the news release once your event begins.

After the event:

- Follow up with reporters who were interested in your event but did not attend. Call them after the event and offer to send them a press kit, the news release, b-roll for television stations and an audio bite for radio stations. Do not forget to track and evaluate your media coverage. Review the stories and interviews to analyze how well your message was delivered.